

Performance Based Assessment

For the social studies teacher, performance based assessment is of value for three main reasons:

- (1) It contributes to the development of active learning.
- (2) It measures student aptitudes and abilities that are not easily measured with multiple-choice questions.
- (3) It facilitates the use of higher order thinking skills and divergent thinking.

Performance based assessment is of value because it promotes and fosters active learning on the part of the students. When a student misses a multiple-choice question, it shows what the student does not know. When a student gets a multiple-choice question correct, you are still not sure what the student actually knows. He or she may have been guessing. Social studies performance tasks require students to construct their own understanding of social studies content and concepts and then apply this understanding to show what they have learned. With a performance task you are able to see right away what a student has and has not learned.

Performance based assessment tasks test abilities that are not easily measured with multiple-choice, matching, or true-false questions. Synthesis of information is an important social studies skill. A multiple-choice test can be used to see if students recognize synthesis of information. A performance based assessment task can be used to show if a student can actually synthesize information.

A performance task allows for higher order thinking skills and divergent thinking. “Higher order thinking skills and divergent thinking” is a mantra for some teachers, many administrators, and almost all educational reformers. Many of them believe that if you repeatedly chant this phrase, students will actually think. Actually getting students to think is a very difficult task. Carefully planned performance assessment tasks with multiple solutions and multiple strategies for obtaining those solutions foster and encourage classification, interpretation, and analysis of information. Performance assessment tasks can require students to synthesize and evaluate information. These tasks can measure students’ problem-solving and decision-making skills.

Performance based assessment is nothing new. What is new is that performance based assessment has come to be seen as the latest means of improving classroom instruction and reforming American education. Whether it will accomplish these goals is unclear. It is with us today. The techniques and procedures of performance based assessment tasks as a classroom activity or to prepare your students for a state-wide examination, they can be rewarding and exciting experiences for you and your students.

Performance Assessment: An Interesting System of Learning pages 9 – 10

[Return to Seminar Overview](#)